TRANSCRIPT—Laura and Jeter Lewis

Fairview Community History Project

Interviewees: Laura and Jeter Lewis

Interviewers: Tealey Ellis and Judith Robertson

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Tealey Ellis: Both of you were born in Madison County and lived there. When did you come to Fairview, and what brought you to Fairview?

Jeter Lewis: I came in ’54, wasn’t it?

Laura Lewis: 1964.

JL: 1964. I was working in South Carolina at the time. We got married and we decided that we’d come back to Asheville. We lived in a trailer park for about a year, over there on Sweeten Creek Road., and then we moved out here.

LL: We bought land out here.

TE: So, had you looked around a lot? What made you decide on Fairview?

JL: I was looking for a job and it’s where I found a job.

LL: We got Duckworth realtor, he found this land for us.

TE: And is this where you moved to?

JL: Yeah.

TE: OK, and so you’ve lived here since?

LL: We’ve lived out here for 54 years.

TE: And what do you like about it?

LL: All of it.

JL: Just a good place to live. Good people.

LL: I took after my grandmother. I liked it.

TE: What did you like in particular?

LL: It just felt like home.

TE: When you moved here, how did it look then? There was a church, new houses?

JL: I'll tell you about the place here first, this was a briar patch from that fence up there, to that fence up there.

LL: There was nothing. Nothing. There wasn't nothing here. No houses. We had, the Riggins lived up here in this little white house. There wasn't nothing between us and the Dotsons' house. Dotsons had their house. Nothing between here.

TE: And was this road paved then?

JL and LL: No.

JL: I'll tell you about it. It was a dirt road. And the state come out and regraded a road and surface treated it. They stayed like that for a few years, three or four years, then come back out here. At that time, I was working for APAC in Enka and it was paved. In fact, I was over the plants when they come out here and paved it. I didn't have anything to do with it, paving it, other than I was over the plants. And they paved it the same time they paved Emmas Grove Road.

TE: How long did it take? Do you remember, roughly?

JL: It took two or three days to pave it. Anywhere you drive in western North Carolina, I had something to do with that paving.

LL: He run the mix for it.

JL: From Murphy to down the mountain at Morganton. Or if you go the other way, from state line in Tennessee on 40, all of 40 until you get down to Morganton. At that time, they had the Appalachian Road, they called it, they were building through Canton and through here. After that, when they changed governors, they decided they would build the interstate. And that's when they decided to do I-40. I was over the paving part, producing the mix that paved any road in western North Carolina that you'd want to drive on, at one time.

Judith Robertson: So, you're saying you worked for an asphalt plant?

JL: For 35 years.

TE: You're spread out in terms of your work and what you did to help to happen. You mentioned Appalachian Road?

JL: That was the road they did through Canton. They were going to do that, through the mountains, and back down into Madison County, but at the time, they decided they were going to build the interstate everywhere, so they started calling that interstate 40.

TE: I was trying to figure out what it would be now.

LL: They changed Fairview when they built 40, the way they come across there and 74. That made a difference in Fairview, access to Fairview, when they built 40 across.

JL: And another thing, when I was at APAC, I helped pave the airport, first time it was built. I paved it three times while I was there. That's part of the community.

TE: I have this visual image of the property here, the way you described it, that it was a briar patch from here to here. How long did it take you to get some land cleared, so you could have a place to live?

JL: We did it in two or three days, we moved our trailer, we was living in a house trailer. Me and my brother-in-law at the time, we come out here, I hate to tell it, on Sunday, and we dug

a septic tank up there where that little house is up there, on a Sunday. We moved the trailer out here the next day, over there from that park on Sweeten Creek Road.

LL: Knox trailer park

JL: And we've lived here ever since.

TE: You did a lot of work, that's for sure.

JL: I'll tell you something else about that trailer. What year was it, it burnt?

LL: '71, that's when we built the house.

JL: '71, she was in the hospital. My mother was up there with her, at Mission Hospital. I took my kids, all three kids, went up the hospital to pick my mother up, and when I come back, the trailer was burnt. I was the one set it on fire.

TE: What happened?

JL: I was cooking dinner for my kids, I had grease on. And when I got back, the trailer was burnt.

TE: Where did you go then?

LL: My brother moved his trailer over here. He wasn't married, and he moved his trailer over here.

JL: I cry, every time I think about it.

TE: I'd cry, too.

JR: But you didn't lose any people.

LL: No.

JL: I had my kids with me, took them up to the hospital to pick my mother up, take her back.

LL: You talk about the church, up here on the hill, the Riggins, and Birchfields, and Taylors, there's five of them got together, and they built the little white church.

JL: That's where the big church is

TE: And what was it called then, do you recall?

LL: It's called the same as it is now.

JR: What is the name of it now?

LL: Fairview Trinity.

JL: Trinity of Fairview.

LL: They put Trinity of Fairview later on it, it was Trinity Baptist Church at the time.

JL: Let me tell you something else about that church. That little white church is inside of that church.

LL: It's still there.

JL: They built that church around it.

LL: So, they got together from the church down here, they broke off from the church, they built that little white church, it wasn't there when we first moved out here. That's how that church got started. Mr. Riggins raised the chicken houses, you see where the trailer sitting up there, it's on the other side of our garden. That is chicken houses there. And he had every year, he raised chickens just to go to that church.

JL: When he sold them, the money went to the church.

TE: How generous.

LL: And when they sent off chickens, what was left, the chickens got away. And my children hated that, because they had to help me clean chickens. So, we had chickens. That's where we got our chickens. And my children hated that.

TE: You said you moved here in 1971.

JL and LL: No, that's when we built the house.

TE: You built the house in '71.

LL: Preacher Ponder was the preacher at the local church. He was from Madison County, and he and Danny his son was builders. They built our house.

TE: What year roughly in your memory do you, when things started being built around here, because I gather there was not many houses out here when you...

JL: There weren't any except one house up there

LL: Mr. Messer owned all this, across the road, and all this behind me.

TE: What was his first name?

JL: Mr. Messer. I don't know what his first name was.

LL: Mr. Messer, he owned it all, and he come over here, and he said, Laura, I've got cancer, in the jaws, and I can't take care of it no longer, and he said you can buy any of it you want of the acreage. And he said I've got to sell it. Well, Mr. Peek bought it, over here in front of me, and he put a restriction on it, which you can't put nothing on it but a house. And the house had to be so big. But, he hurt his self. He bought it up, he bought two tracts, he bought the tract he put his house on, and the tract alongside of it, he wanted to put up a barn on it for his horses. It didn't work.

JL: Because of his restriction. He couldn't build his barn. Anyway, that's when we built the house, in '71, and we've lived in this house ever since.

LL: Our land though had no restriction, it come from a different buyer. But we had to get a deed, something about the one we bought it from had to get a divorce from his wife or

something they said ours wasn't true, because they started in the middle of the road, so we had to get a new survey, get a new deed, didn't we, Father?

TE: So, how would you describe this little community, once you got your house built?

JL: It started escalating, everybody started building down this a way.

LL: Mr. Messer sold off, his houses come in here right after that, he went, moved over to that condominium and bought in there. It just exploded.

TE: Did you feel safe in this community?

JL and LL: Oh, yeah

TE: Do you now?

JL: Oh, yeah.

LL: No, not as safe.

JL: Well, lot of people walk the road now. We got to where we lock our doors, put it that way.

LL: We have trouble right now up on Gravely Branch Road a little ways, that's where they put homes up there, what they call it, Troy Homes? They come out of there.

TE: I assume, do you lock your doors?

JL: We do overnight.

TE: Did you lock your doors when you first lived here at night?

JL and LL: No, no.

LL: We had one black man that robbed us. The neighbors up here, he was in the road, they got him. They got him in the middle of the night, didn't they, father?

JL: Across the hill right there, that's a colored community. Just across the hill, right there. They're the finest people you've ever seen. We've never had a minute's problem out of one of them. We just get along. They'd do anything in the world for you.

LL: Poor old Debbie. My son had to go to summer school, my oldest son did, and she rode with me. And she wrecked up right in front of this church just back of this in the summer, brand new car, and she took the bottom out of it up there in that ditch, and Pop walked up there, nobody was helping her, nobody would stop and help her. The preacher Adam, the youth preacher that come down there, and nobody come on a Saturday morning, Pop went up there, and she was going to love his neck. "Mr. Lewis, Mr. Lewis, you come to help me." They called an ambulance for her, and her sitting in that car hurt. I said "Pop, because of the color of her skin, nobody don't want to help Debbie." I said "why in the world didn't they stop and help Debbie?" It hurt my feelings, because nobody didn't stop and help Debby. The people up there at the church didn't walk down there and help her, I thought hmmm.

TE: When your children started school, where did they go?

JL: Fairview.

LL: Reynolds.

TE: There was a bus picked them up?

LL: And Mr. Briggs picked them up, and my son went to, my second son, went to this pilot program, first time in Fairview, and he's four years old and he had short legs, and Mr. Briggs would reach down there and pull him up on that bus.

JL: All three of our kids went on to Reynolds and graduated Reynolds. And every one of them has been to college.

TE: What did your children think about Fairview Elementary and later Reynolds?

LL: They loved it. My kids had no problem. Of course, mama stayed right there with them.

JL: They like it here. My son lives right up there now.

LL: He's the one that's got grandkids.

TE: Did any of your children when they were at Reynolds, were they involved in any sports?

JL and LL: Not much.

LL: We had a sister, her son was in sports. She lived up here, she passed away, they moved her trailer out, that's when, we had the shop built, they moved her out, she died up there, and her son, he left from here and went to Hawaii, because his marriage broke up.

TE: What, thinking back in your earlier days in Fairview, were there any people that you considered leaders of the community?

JL: Well, Mr. Carter that lived up on the hill, he sells trailers up there on the hill.

TE: And what's his first name?

LL: Dean. Dean and Juanita.

JL: And when they built my house, regraded the whole thing, and put in the septic system, they was good to help people. You had to pay them, but they would help you. If you had a problem, they's help you. When our trailer burnt, we got more stuff from the community than we had when it burnt.

LL: We had the church up here, they brought down a hundred dollars to hook up my brother's power, and when they rebuilt the church windows, I give them the hundred dollars back, I said you give me a hundred dollars, I'll give you a hundred dollars back.

TE: That strong sense of community, do you think that exists now?

JL: It's changed a whole lot.

LL: It's changed too much.

JL: People's moving in here's doing other things. You don't get to know them too well. People don't go visit like they used to do.

TE: Everybody's busy I guess.

LL: There's too much hard feelings. People wear their feelings on their shoulders. I guess you'uns noticed that too.

TE: Is this church up here on the hill, Trinity, was that your church?

JL: It was at that time.

LL: But now it's changed.

JL: We go to Emmas Grove on the other hill up there. In fact, I tried going to church up there, and I became a deacon up there, set it up, and paid the whole church a lot. I helped them rebuild the sanctuary, moved everything out of it, helped them building the sanctuary

JR: That was a huge contribution.

JL: I didn't pay for it. I went up there, I set it up, collected the money from the people.

TE: You spent time.

LL: And then he brought in the man that done it.

JL: I brought in the people that done it, and they come from Madison County, did a good job.

TE: What kind of, the church you used to attend up there, what kind of celebrations or events, activities did the church have?

JL: At that time it was just that little white church, it wasn't...

LL: I didn't go up there.

JL: I worked seven days a week when I was working, but we really didn't participate much and never did go to church after they built the new church, because we were going up to Emmas Grove.

LL: And too, his parents was sick, and we had to go to Madison County to take care of them.

TE: This question is more, I think, about your children maybe than the two of you but as your children were growing up and becoming teenagers, what kinds of things did they do for recreation and fun and hanging out, activities.

LL: We camped out. We camped. We went to the lake, stayed on the lake.

TE: Which lake was that?

LL: Every one of them.

JL: South Carolina.

LL: And up in Watauga, the mountains, and Robbinsville, we stayed on the lakes. Every one of them. My son says, "mama, I wish I had the time to go like you'ns did." I said, "Son, we found the time". And said the only thing he missed, his girls, two girls, taking them like we went. But I said, "Son you done a lot of grumbling, didn't you?"

JL: We've been to Alaska six times. We've been to every state in the United States, some of them two or three times,

LL: And we've been across the seas.

JL: Hawaii, we went to Germany,

LL: Switzerland.

JL: after I retired. The company sent me to Germany, I mean Hawaii, and paid me and her way for a week.

LL: Our children, when they got time, when they was growing up, if he had any time off, we was in the mountains, hiking, we took them hiking, we took them camping, so our kids stayed with us, and stuff like that.

TE: That's a great life you gave your children.

LL: Even up as teenagers, we kept them busy. That way they couldn't get in trouble.

JR: Well, and they learned a lot too, and they developed values.

TE: And somewhere along the way they understood appreciating the land.

LL: They loved it. That's the reason they go there. My daughter she just bought a place down in South Carolina, sold it, and went up next to Elizabethton, Tennessee, and bought a farmhouse, and she's rebuilding it now, up there next to Watauga Lake.

JL: All of our kids went to college. My son's a doctor, got his doctorate degree. My daughter, she's a registered nurse out on 191 at this home out there. And Dale's superintendent of a plant up in one I was over, took my job, basically.

TE: The two of you certainly valued education, as a result of what your children have done and you should be proud of that and very pleased as parents.

LL: and I'm pushing these great-grandkids. This one [ ] and this traveling ballplaying. Going to Mount Airy the week after next.

JR: Is that basketball?

LL: Yes, it is. She's twelve.

TE: Well, everybody has different interests and directions, and sports do fit into it

LL: That's the reason that's out in the yard out there.

TE: What kinds of stores were there in Fairview when you all moved here?

LL: Well, let's see here. We had that one Miss Tickles had that one out here at the end.

JL: Where Cane Creek goes into 74.

What kind of store was it?

LL: It was a variety store, not much.

JL: Country store, basically.

LL: And then Miss Dotson had one down here, wasn't much. And we had Miss Maxwell out the corner. And then we had, never did go into, Mr. Merrell's store. So that was about it. You didn't have much of a choice.

TE: Had to go into Asheville for other kinds of shopping, I guess.

LL: Yes. You just didn't have very much of a choice around here. And Mr. Ingles was our buddy. When we first moved here, when we was in the trailer park over there, he had the gas station there where they put the fire station in on Rock Hill Road, and Mr. Ingles opened up his first supermarket, and we was buddies with him.

TE: And where was it?

LL: There on Hendersonville Road

JL: What's in there right now? The store's still there.

LL: The store's still there, but there's something else in there now.

TE: Is that in Fletcher or Asheville?

JL: There on 25, Biltmore.

LL: And there's something else in that old store where he first opened up, that was his first store. And Kress shopping center, they had another one in there. And he drove the pink Cadillac. I guess old man Ingle was just wanting to manage that variety story.

JL: That's basically the store where you bought clothes. Kind of like a five and ten

LL: That was in Kress shopping center, you remember that, don't you.

TE: I don't, I'm not from here. I've only lived here a short time.

JR: I'm not familiar with Kress Shopping Center. Where would that be?

LL: On Biltmore, where Ingles is down there now?

JR: South Forest?

LL: South Forest. There was one in there now. And he was the one drove the pink Cadillac.

JR: There was a motel in that area there. Forest Crest I think it was.

JL: That's up on the hill.

JR: Oh, a little further up, OK.

LL: A little further up. This was in the shopping center. He had a variety one in there, he had all kinds of stuff in there. We were in there, and there was some black boys come in there. And they was stealing these, back then they had those tapes that you listen to music and they was in there stealing them, because they went out with them. And he couldn't do a thing about it, could he, Pa? But they was bad to do that, come in there, and he couldn't do nothing about it.

JL: They probably don't know it about Mr. Ingles, but his dad run a store down on Sweeten Creek Road down at the end of the

LL: Knox trailer park

JL: Where the Knox trailer park is, little old store there, that's where you bought your meat, we'd go there and buy, that's where he had fresh meat. But that's where Mr. Ingle started.

TE: And that would have been what year?

LL: It was 1963. And that's how we got to know Mr. Ingles then, and then he went over and built this store on Hendersonville Road.

JR: So that's where you went to shop.

LL: That's where we shopped. And when we moved out here, to buy groceries, that's where we bought our groceries.

Do either of you recall any real catastrophes, bad fires, floods, anything like that?

LL: Yes, we did. We was down in Florida, and we come in here, that was in '71, and we come in here, and when the dam broke and drowned this man and that baby, that baby was up in the tree out here at the forks in the road, Mills Gap and Concord Road, and they told us we couldn't come home, couldn't come through. We told them we had to come home, come through there.

JL: We'd been to Florida

LL: We had been in Florida for about three days, it was a holiday

JR: What year was that?

LL: Honey, I can't remember what year that was. Dam on the mountain broke, and it come down through here, wiped out that little golf course on Mills Gap Road and it caused damage in them trailers, you know it's got that trailer park up there.

JR: I didn't know about that.

LL: You didn't know about that one?

TE: I hadn't heard that.

LL: You hadn't heard it?

JL: It was a long time ago.

LL: It has been a good while back. Ten years back you could look in back papers and find that.

JR: Ten years back?

JL: More than that, 30 years

LL: Look in the newspaper. You'll find it. You have to back up years. I lived out here too long. But it drowned a man, and it caught that baby, and the baby I think it was about nine months old, and it caught in a tree, on out past Merrell's store, at that intersection,

JL: On the bridge right there that goes up to a house above the creek.

LL: on the bridge right there, and it caught up in that tree and that's where they found the baby. And it was a little boy, I think it was a little boy.

JR: I see you have a little stream in your back yard, which is very pretty, does it overflow?

JL: Look there, you can see the rocks shining.

LL: It overflows. Anyway, I just know that that was the horriblest thing around here. But honey, I've seen water up to that garage behind him, seen it come up my son's ditch down yonder, and I've seen it come over his patio, and I've seen it just like a river down through that hallway, and it goes all the way down to Cane Creek, and that road blocks it, it blocks it.

TE: Do either of you remember back in the day when there might have been any boarding houses around in this area?

LL: No, I don't remember that.

JL: I can tell you about boarding houses but it's not here. I worked in South Carolina for thirteen years. That's where I lived, in boarding houses.

TE: Do either of you have any thought, anything you've thought about, might want to share today that either of you have not been asked about? Is there a topic that we've missed? Anything that is special to you, living here, that we haven't talked about.

LL: Not really.

JL: We've talked about a lot of it.

TE: Because you mentioned a little while ago, Mrs. Lewis, about the flood, that we could go back in old newspapers and find it and generations ahead of us are going to be looking for information. There're going to find some of the things you said. And OK, that's what we're looking for. I want to thank you both for sharing your very interesting life, and experiences, with us. It's been a real pleasure., and a joy, and I thank you very much.

JL: You're welcome.